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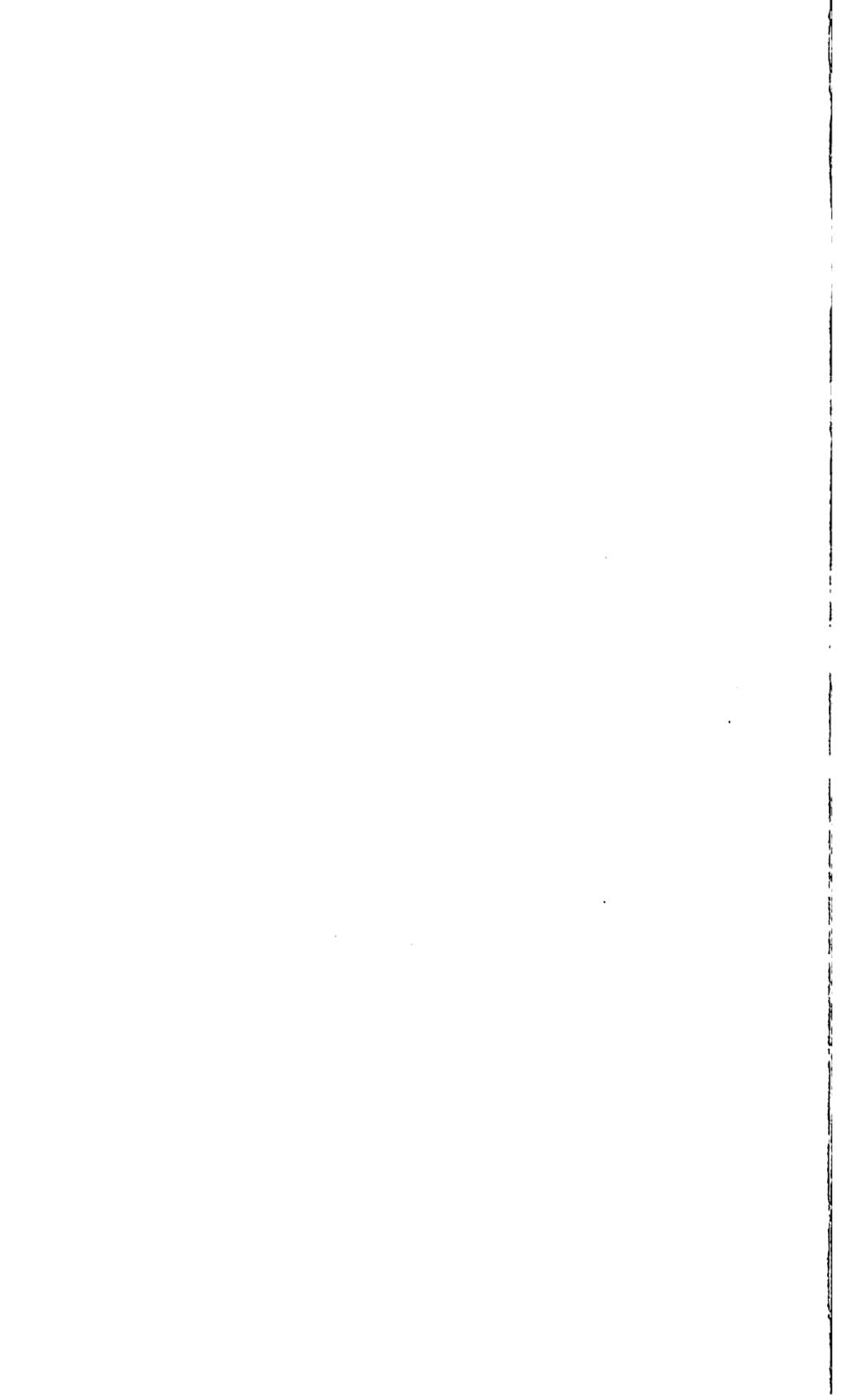
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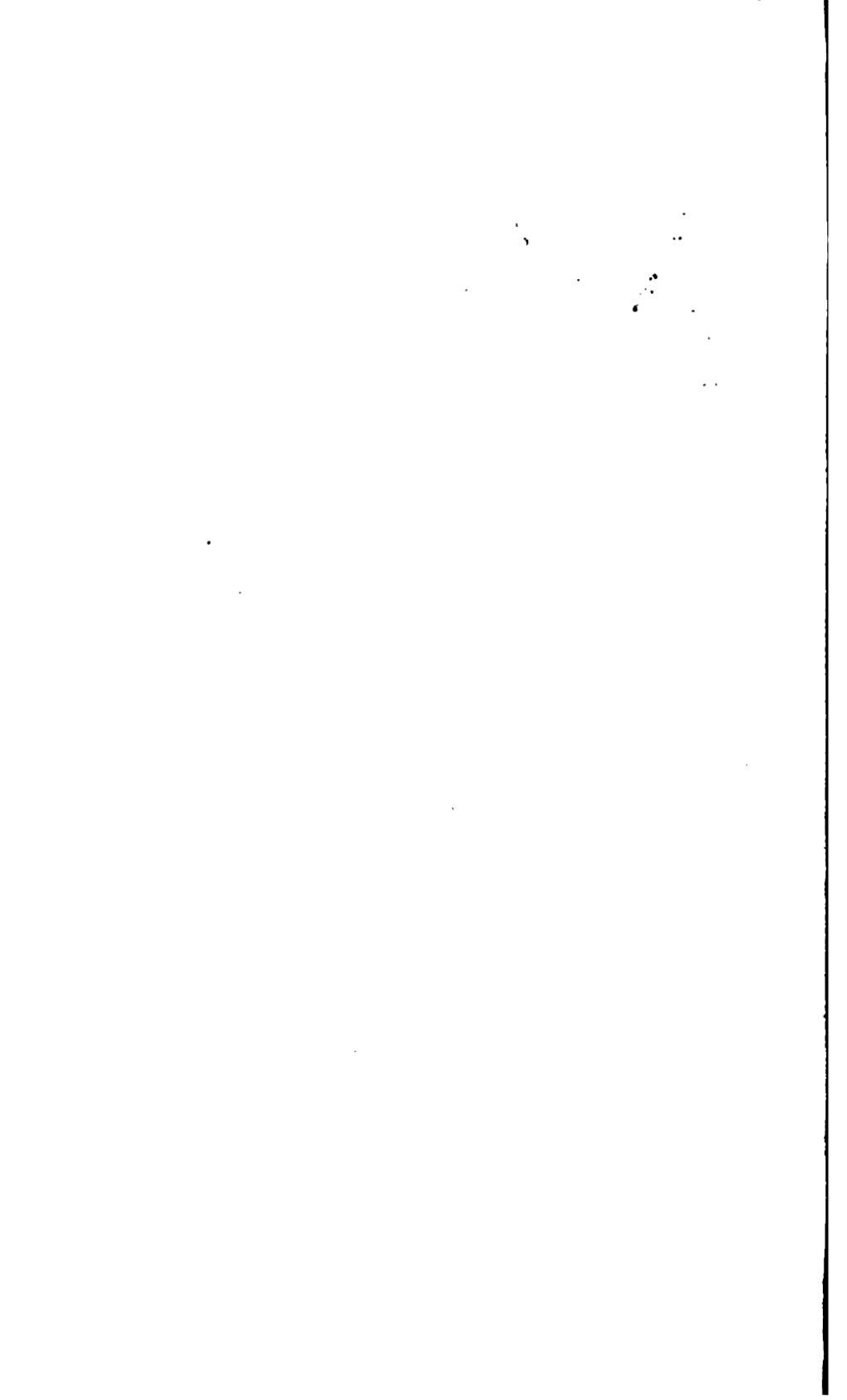


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Wheler
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* NCLT





AN
HISTORICAL ACCOUNT

OF THE

BIRTH-PLACE OF SHAKESPEARE.

BY

THE LATE R. B. WHELER, ESQ.

REPRINTED FROM THE EDITION OF 1824,

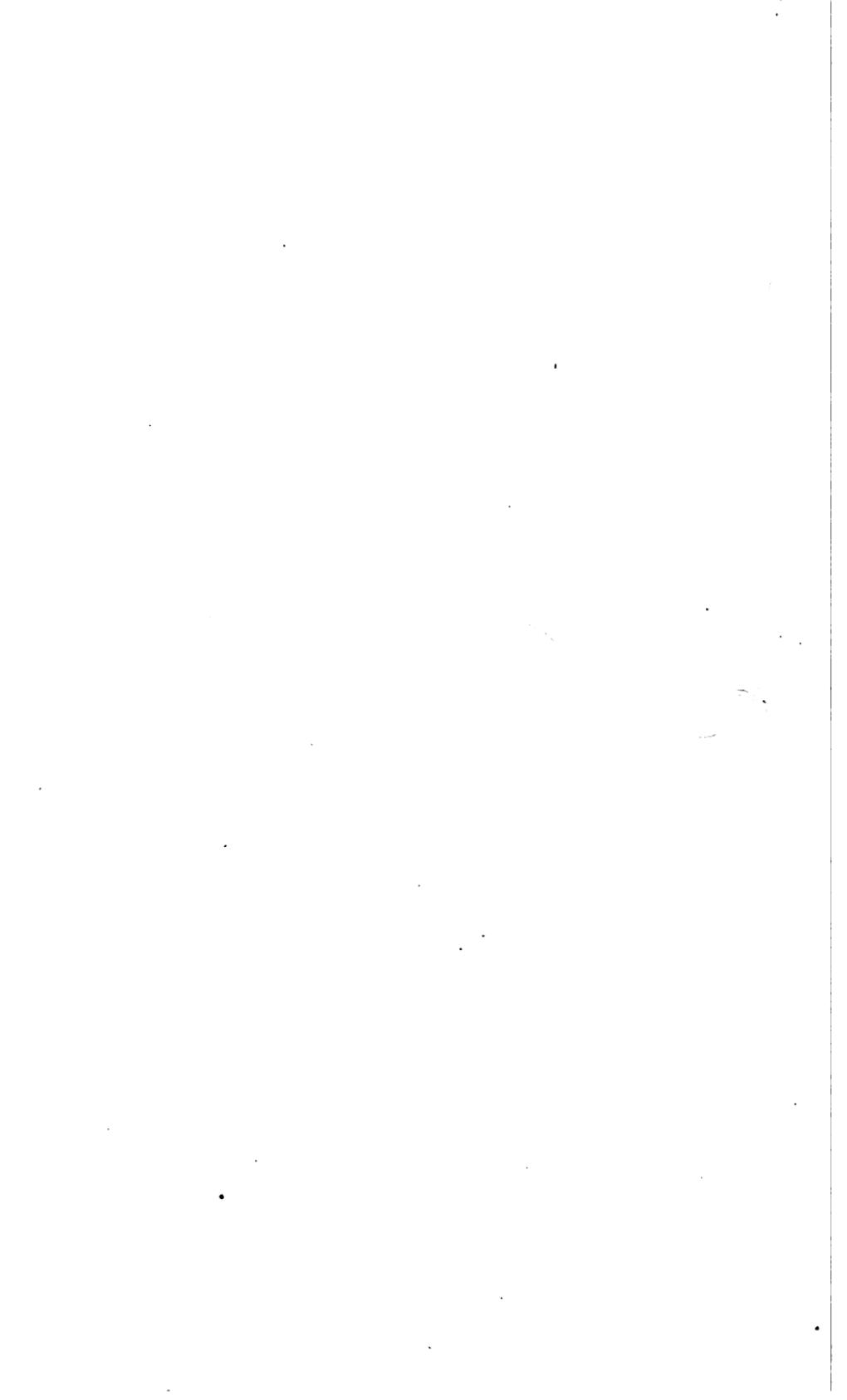
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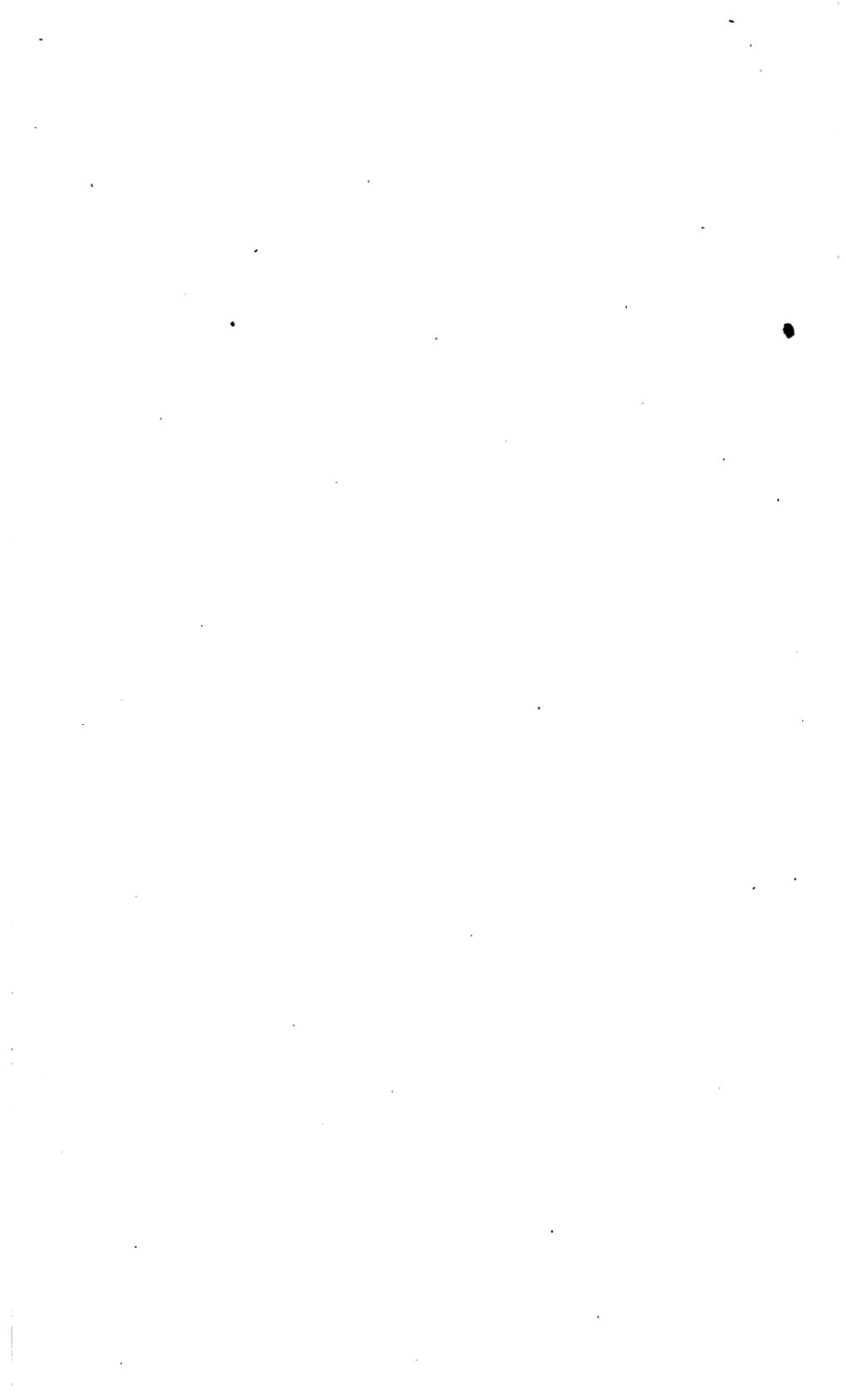
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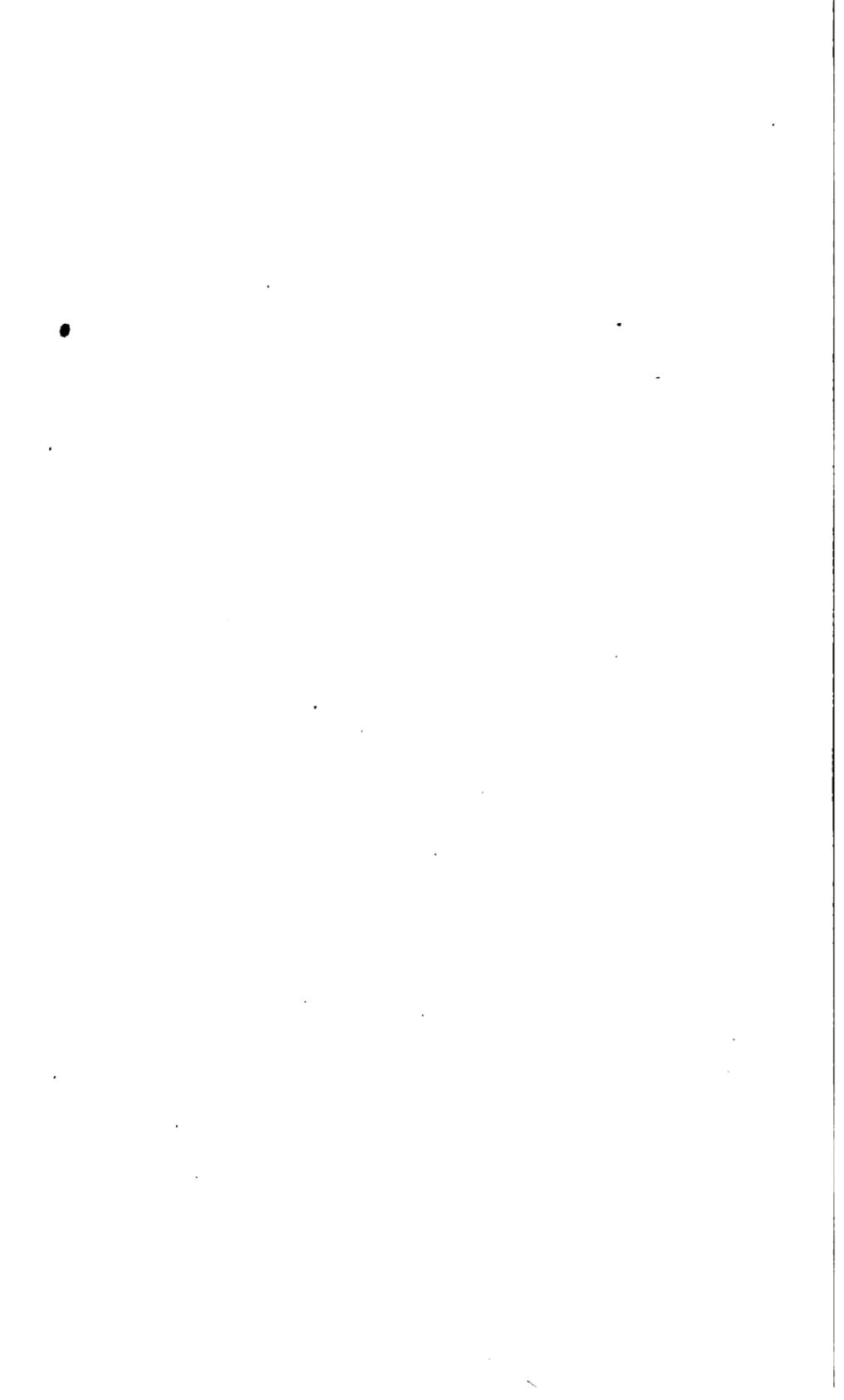


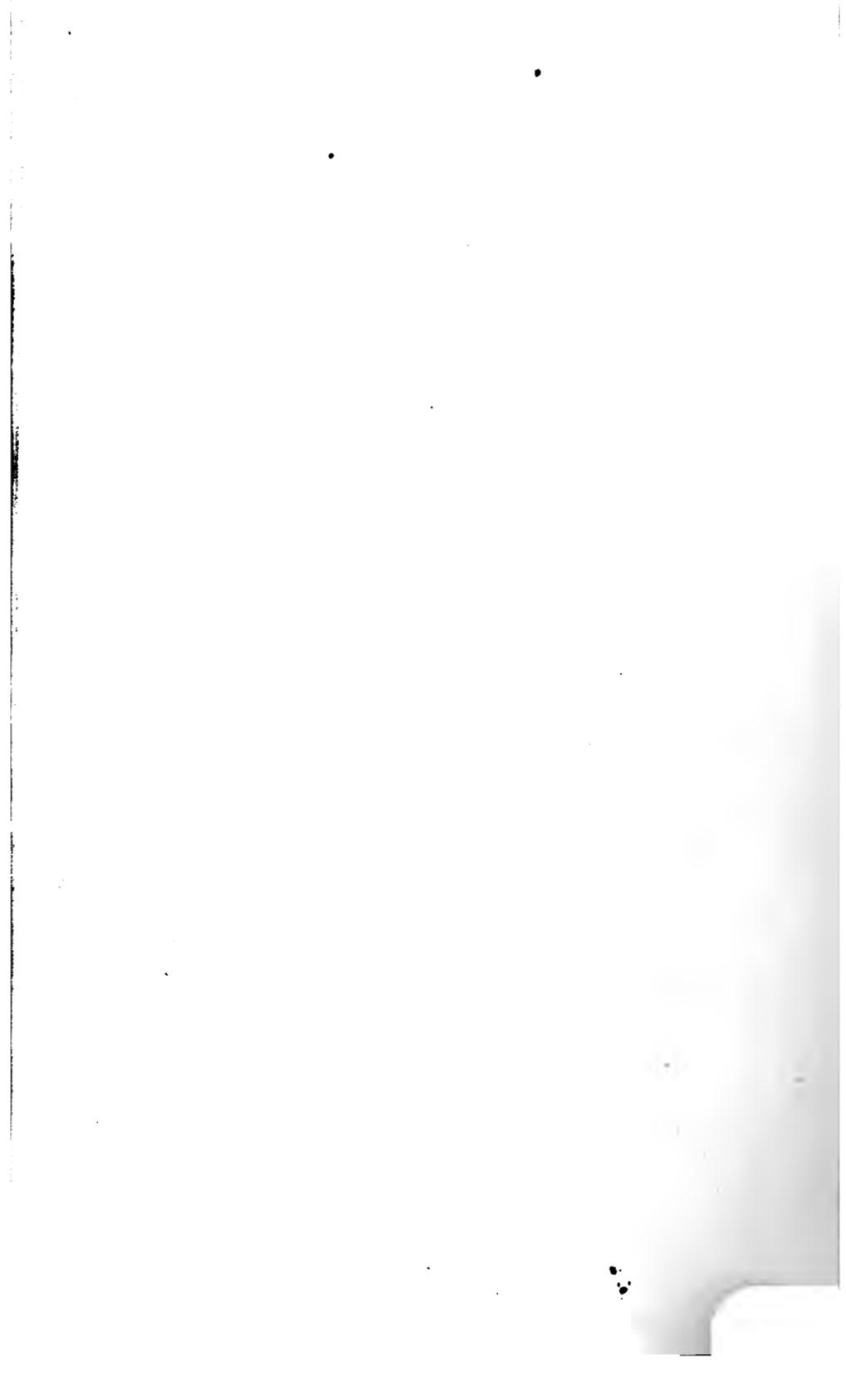
STRATFORD-ON-AVON:
SOLD AT THE POET'S BIRTH-PLACE, FOR THE BENEFIT
OF THE BIRTH-PLACE FUND.

1863.









is ascertained by indubitable authority ; and that locality has been indicated as the Birth-place from time immemorial, the fact being handed down by persons unacquainted with the evidence alluded to. It is unreasonable to expect at this day a more exact line of proof. The most probable supposition is that John Shakespeare lived in the Birth-place during the whole of his residence in Stratford, first as tenant and afterwards as owner, there being no reason for believing that he ever inhabited any one of his copyhold tenements, which were in all probability houses of an inferior description.

The frontispiece to this tract, engraved by De La Motte in 1788, and here impressed from the original copperplate presented to the Shakespeare Museum by E. Vere Nicoll, esq. represents the Birth-place as it appeared in the last century. By the year 1806, it had been sadly altered. The dormer windows had then been removed, and the porch taken away, the extreme right of the building having been also much changed. At that time, the western part, containing the Birth-room, was tenanted by a butcher, the other portion of the edifice being an inn called the Swan and Maidenhead. The latter was afterwards fronted with red brick, a process which of course destroyed its original character.

In this state the buildings remained until they became the property of the nation by means of a large public subscription. I am so strongly opposed to all restorations of ancient relics, believing them to be generally indefensible, except when rendered indispensable by the necessities of religious services, it

requires all one's strong admiration of the manner in which the Birth-place has been made to resume its ancient form to reconcile me to the process; and even then it does not do it. I would far rather the premises had been simply protected against the casualties of fire and the weather, and then left in precisely the state in which they had been purchased. Having thus ventured on an opinion which I fear will be considered heresy at Stratford, it is satisfactory to be able to say that, *as a restoration*, one can safely regard the structure in its present form as probably the most successful work of the kind ever accomplished. The admirable care that has been taken to preserve to a nicety the various details, and to settle the accuracy of those details by the various indications of the original structure, confers the highest credit on the great ability of Mr. Edward Gibbs, and on the sagacity of the Birth-place Committee.

The Birth-place can hardly now be dismissed without an allusion to a relic which has of late years been placed in one of its upper rooms, and has become an object of considerable attraction. It is scarcely necessary to say that I allude to an oil-painting of Shakespeare, discovered a few years ago in the residence of W. O. Hunt, esq., and generously presented by that gentleman to the town of Stratford. Large sums were offered for this relic, which, in the opinion of many, whose judgments are entitled to consideration, is a painting from life. Although I do not share in this opinion, believing it to be a painting of the last century, and one consequently of no *authority*, yet its *genuineness* as an old portrait of

Shakespeare is unquestionable. I may add, although I have not the permission to mention their names, that two of the most competent judges in such matters this country can boast of have kindly given me their decided opinions that this painting was executed *before* the middle of the last century. Accepting this view, the portrait may fairly be considered one of great curiosity ; perhaps the most interesting relic of the kind that has yet been discovered.

J. O. H.

West Brompton, 6th Feb. 1863.





BIRTH-PLACE OF SHAKESPEARE.

Here his first infant lays sweet Shakespeare sung.

 F a spot celebrated in the annals of topographical fame for giving birth to the immortal Shakespeare, the public has not hitherto been furnished with a connected history. The following observations are founded upon documents for which the authorities are indisputable.

These humble and dilapidated but interesting premises are situated near the north-west end of Henley Street, Stratford-upon-Avon ; and though now possessing a cheerless appearance, were doubtless the comfortable habitation of a respectable family in the early part of Elizabeth's reign. At that, and indeed at a much later period, they were considerably more extensive ; for several portions on the western side have been at various times sold away, apparently to extend, though in part subsequently separated from, the adjoining property now constituting the White Lion Inn.

John Shakespeare, the father of our poet, does not appear to have been a native of Stratford ; but that he settled in the town soon after the year 1550 is conjectured by Malone with great probability ; for in 1555 a suit was instituted against him in our Bailiff's Court. It is also ascertained that he married Mary Arden in 1557, and that in the following year their daughter Joan, the eldest sister of our poet, was born.

In this lowly abode it has been the invariable and uncontradicted tradition of the town, that our inimitable bard drew his first breath, upon St. George's Day, 23rd of April, 1564. It is, therefore, highly probable that his father, finding these premises suitable to his rank and occupation in life, resided and carried on his trade in them upon first establishing himself at Stratford; a circumstance which derives some confirmation from his subsequently becoming their purchaser. Certain it is, that in 1574, two houses in Stratford, with a garden and orchard annexed to each, were purchased by John Shakespeare from Edmund Hall, and Emma his wife, for £40; a sum for which his wife's estate at Wilmcote, near Stratford, was mortgaged in 1578, perhaps to replace this purchase-money. That these houses were situated in Henley Street, is ascertained as well by Shakespeare's will, as by deeds referred to in a subsequent page; and derives additional confirmation from a family settlement quoted by Ireland in his Warwickshire Avon, which though Dr. Drake with some, not altogether unwarrantable, apprehension of imposition, seems to have considered apocryphal, was, as appears from reference to original papers connected with the title, indubitably authentic. By this deed (14th August, 33 Elizabeth, 1591) a house in Henley Street, part of the then Swan Inn, but now the White Lion, is conveyed to trustees by George Badger, a draper of this town, for the benefit of himself and family; and is described as situated between the houses of Robert Johnson and of John Shakespeare. From the same reference it is ascertained, that to this George Badger (26th January, 39 Elizabeth, 1597) our poet's father, then described as a yeoman, sold for £2 10. a toft or parcel of land in Henley-Street, Stratford, the house of John Shakespeare being on the east part, and that of George Badger on

the west, which precisely corresponds with the existing boundaries. This was, probably, the only alienation which John Shakespeare made in diminution of his original purchase.

Upon John Shakespeare's death and intestacy in September, 1601, these houses descended to his eldest son, our great dramatic bard, who it may be presumed did not afterwards reside in them; for in 1597, several years before his father's death, and when only thirty-three years of age, he had purchased New Place, the best house in Stratford, in which he resided and where "the last accents falter'd on his tongue." No further mention of his Birth-place occurs until our poet made his will upon the 25th of March, 1616, about a month before his death. To his sister Joan Hart he devised for her life only, and under the yearly rent of twelve pence, the house with the appurtenances in Stratford wherein she dwelt; and in which, as she resided there in 1639, she probably continued till 1646, the period of her death. This was, doubtless, the western house now shown as the poet's Birth-place; and which, from the continuation of the framed timber front, and from the old door-ways communicating internally, had apparently included the adjoining tenement, but which in 1771 was separated from the property. In 1639, Joan Hiccox, widow, inhabited the other house, which it is supposed had several years previously been converted into the Maidenhead Inn, of which John Rutter was the landlord in 1642.

During the civil wars, that melancholy but interesting period of English history, Stratford was principally occupied by the Parliamentary forces, who, in 1642, under the command of Lord Brooke, drove the Royalists out of the town. From that time till 1645 the inhabitants necessarily submitted to the prevailing party, from whom they were

very considerable sufferers. In an old MS. entitled, "A Booke of such damages as hath beeene sustained by such persons of the said Burrough (of Stratford-upon-Avon) as have put in their bills from the Parliament forces, by free quarter, contribucion, and otherwise, 1645," it appears that the two following accounts were delivered :—

The Bill of the Orphan Children of Jone Hiccox :—Thomas and Amie.

Imprimis. Tooke away by the Lord Brook's soldiers, when hee came to Stratford, and drove away the King's forces there ; as followeth :—

Imprimis. 17 silver spoones ; 2 silver boles, a bigger and a lesser ; a double silver salt ; in old money 3li. 7s. and divers other things in a trunke, to the value of	li.
	20 00 00
Itm. paid by their Feoffees, for the howse called the Maidenhead, unto Warr. garrison for 33 monethes	08 15 08
	<hr/>
Tot. of this	28 15 08
	<hr/>

John Rutter's Bill.

Lent for the P.liamt. wch. was paid to Mr. Brian of Warr. Castle	02 00 00
Towards Dragoone horses for the Lord Brooks . . .	00 05 00
Towards Dragoone horses for ye Earle of Denbigh .	00 03 06
Charges of contribucon. to Colonell Bridges for 33 moneths, ending January last, 1645	11 06 08
Charges wth. Capt. Stephens' troope under Col. Beare	12 05 08
Charges wth. Col. Beare's men under Capt. Jenkins .	02 10 00
Charges on the Earle of Denbighe's soldiers . . .	00 15 00
Charges wth. Colonell Stephens' men	00 03 06
Lent to the relief of Ireland	00 05 00
Paid to the Poll money	00 03 00
Charges by Excise paid to Job Lord and Mr. Burnell	06 00 00
Goods taken away by the Parliamt. soldiers at several times to the value of	01 00 00
	<hr/>
Tot. of this	36 17 04
	<hr/>

In the Chamberlains' Accounts for the year 1642, the following entry appears :—

Paid John Rutter of the Maydenheade for the enter-
taynm't. of Colonell Fines, and 2 pottells of Wine,
as per his Bill 0 14 0

In a subsequent part of his will, Shakespeare devised his two houses in Henley Street successively to his daughters Susannah and Judith, and their male issue. Judith alone had male issue, three sons, who died young, and in their parents' lifetime. Whilst this property remained in the possession of Shakespeare's immediate descendants, it was several times made subservient to their family arrangements. By a deed of the 27th of May, 1639, and a fine and recovery, Trinity and Michaelmas Terms, 15th Charles I, Mrs. Susannah Hall, Shakespeare's eldest daughter, with Thomas Nash, esq. and Elizabeth his wife (Mrs. Hall's only child) confirmed this and our bard's other estates to Mrs. Hall for her life, and afterwards settled them upon Mr. and Mrs. Nash, and her issue; but in the event of her leaving no family, then upon Mr. Nash. As, however, Mr. Nash died 4th April, 1647, without issue, a resettlement of the property was immediately adopted, to prevent its falling to the heir of Mr. Nash, who had by his will of the 26th of August, 1642, devised his reversionary interest in the principal part of Shakespeare's estates to his cousin Edward Nash. By a subsequent settlement, therefore, of the 2nd of June, 1647, and by another fine and recovery, Easter and Michaelmas Terms, 23 Charles I, Shakespeare's natal place and his other estates were again limited to the bard's descendants, restoring to Mrs. Nash the ultimate power over the property. This explanation serves to correct Malone's erroneous supposition, although he had reference to the documents above quoted,

that Mrs. Nash exchanged the patrimonial lands which her husband had bequeathed to her, with Edward Nash and his son, and took New Place, &c. instead of them. Sir John Barnard was the second husband of Mrs. Nash, who by her will of the 29th of January, 1669, devised her messuage or inn, then called the Maidenhead, and the adjoining house and barn occupied by Michael Johnson, successively unto her kinsmen Thomas and George Hart, sons of Thomas Hart, of Stratford.

Of their subsequent descent a minute and technical deduction would be uninteresting and superfluous. Thomas Hart, to whom the houses were given by Lady Barnard, was grandson of Shakespeare's sister Joan; and dying without issue, his brother George, as Lady Barnard's will directed, succeeded to the property. Upon the death of George Hart, 29th of April, 1702, the premises came to his son Shakespeare Hart, a glazier of Stratford, and continued in the possession of the Hart's family until the commencement of the present century. By the widow and children of John Hart, a turner of Tewksbury, who was the sixth descendant in a direct line from our bard's sister, these premises, after some difficulty in obtaining a purchaser in consequence of their dilapidated condition, were first sold out of the family, in 1806, to Mr. Thomas Court, of Stratford, the late landlord of the Maidenhead, to whose widow and family, the present occupiers, they now (1824) belong.

The external appearance of these celebrated buildings is not very attractive, nor does the internal arrangement encourage the idea of their having afforded that domestic comfort to a respectable family of which they were nevertheless capable in the reign of Elizabeth. The lapse of more than two hundred years, and the want of sufficient repairs

to these houses whilst in the possession of the Harts of the last and present centuries, who were burthened with a heavy mortgage, and in humble circumstances, have tended in a great degree to their gradual neglect and decay. That they were originally of greater extent on the western side is indubitable; for, in 1597, John Shakespeare, as is before noticed, sold a small plot of land to George Badger, which was added to his premises, afterwards called the Swan Inn. Shakespeare Hart, in 1746, for £7 sold to Mr. John Payton (father of the late Alderman Payton) another part of the yard or garden lying between Shakespeare Hart's garden and the yard of the Swan Inn. A third diminution of the original property occurred at Lady Day, 1771, when Thomas Hart sold to Alderman Payton, for £140, four tenements fronting Henley-street, between Shakespeare's birth-place and the old Swan, now the White Lion Inn; and also the site of a barn, the same perhaps as is mentioned in Lady Barnard's Will, adjoining to the Guildpits and the back gates belonging to the Swan Inn. The land thus separated is now blended with the White Lion Inn, under which general name is included the Swan property, the two inns having been united about the year 1753, and recently purchased by the present landlord Mr. Thomas Arkell; but the late Mr. Jonathan Izod became the proprietor of the four tenements, three of which were apparently erected or converted into habitations at the beginning of the last century, for before that period they seem to be unnoticed; and the other, as is before observed, evidently forms a part of the primitive structure to which it adjoins.

The Maidenhead, as it is called in the old title deeds, was probably converted into a public house soon after the commencement of the seventeenth century; but how early it

acquired the appellation of the Swan and Maidenhead is uncertain. It has been suggested that this house owed its sign to some immediate successor of Shakespeare, and that it was adopted in compliment to the “sweet Swan of Avon,” combined with his sovereign Queen and patroness, the “fair vestal throned by the west.” As there was in 1610 a public house at the north-east end of Bridge-street, called the Swan, the original sign of Shakespeare’s house might have been the Swan and Maidenhead, though for brevity the term Maidenhead only was generally adopted. The old painted sign, probably copied from some anterior one, represented a swan on the sedgy bank of a river; and in the sinister compartment, to use an heraldic expression, was a Maiden’s head crowned, as borne by the Mercer’s Company.

In some proceedings of the Borough Court of Record, at the suit of Richard Wylkins against John Rogers, 24 April, 39 Eliz. 1597, a house called the Maidenhead is mentioned; whether John Shakespeare’s house is uncertain, the name of the street being omitted, and the names of Wylkins and Rogers not appearing from any papers yet discovered, to be connected with the Shakespearean Maidenhead.

Of the adjoining house in which our divine bard is universally stated to have been born, a general description is necessary. Through a butcher’s shop which contains no prominent memorial to invite or detain curiosity, the stranger is shewn into a kitchen of limited proportions and comparative obscurity. A few years since, a board was suspended in this shop, bearing the following incongruous inscription—

“ WILLIAM SHAKSPEARE WAS BORN IN THIS HOUSE.

“ N.B.—A horse and taxed cart to let.”

In the window facing the fire-place was formerly inserted

a piece of stained glass, bearing the arms of the Merchants of the Staple, which Ireland conjectured to have existed there in the time of Shakespeare's father, who, until Malone discovered him to have been a glover—although Aubrey describes him as a butcher, and the deed previously referred to represents him as a yeoman—had been considered as a dealer in wool; of his following which trade, and in support of Rowe's assertion to that effect, this glass was adduced as a corroborating testimony. This purpose, however, it could not answer; for old Thomas Hart constantly declared that his great uncle Shakespeare Hart, being employed (as he certainly was upon such occasions towards the close of the seventeenth century) to repair the windows of the chapel, brought it thence, and introduced it into his own window. Alderman Payton afterwards obtained it, and in 1793 presented it to Malone; by whom, at least at that period, it was so highly appreciated, that in return Mr. Payton received a fine copy of Mr. Malone's edition of our poet's works which that commentator had recently published.

Inserted in the northern wall of this room there lately existed a mutilated plaster representation, in relievo, of the battle between David and Goliah (whether of equal antiquity with the period of Shakespeare is unknown) and originally surrounded by this inscription,

Goliah comes with sword and spear,
And David with a sling;
Although Goliah rage and sweare,
Down David doth him bring.

[On a scroll] SAMUEL, XVII. A.D. 1606.

These verses are not remaining, and the relic itself, of whatever value or antiquity, although there is no doubt of its having been long attached to these premises, is traced

no higher than 1759 by Ireland, in whose Warwickshire Avon the first notice of it appears; it was then fixed over the fire-place in the south-east angle of the front parlour of the Maidenhead, the chimney of which obtruded into the street, previous to its removal to the eastern side of the room when Court new-fronted that house with brick; a circumstance to be regretted, its original appearance being so changed, that we may exclaim with our poet—

In this, the antique and well noted face
Of plain old form is much disfigured.

Above the butcher's shop, and approached by a narrow stair-case leading out of the kitchen, is the chamber lighted by a front window, in which Shakespeare is traditionally said to have been born. Here he was happily preserved from the plague that in a few months afterwards swept away one-seventh of the Stratfordians. It would be endless to particularize the numerous devotees who have literally covered the whitewashed walls and ceiling of this unadorned and almost unfurnished chamber with names and extemporary poetry. Their memorials, however, sufficiently evince the increasing resort to this hallowed roof.

In this lowly dwelling some antiquated lumber was formerly imposed upon the world as its original furniture at the period of Shakespeare, but to none of which the least authenticity belonged. In the moment of unsuspecting enthusiasm, persons of easy faith in such matters too implicitly relied upon its originality; for it is well known that the furniture of this house has undergone more alterations than the building itself, and that it has, of late years at least, changed with every tenant. The chair for which the Princess Czartoryska in 1790 gave twenty guineas, was as spurious as that which immediately supplied its place.

It was, however, conveyed to the Continent with a certificate of its authenticity ; and Burnet, in his View of the Present State of Poland, p. 257, mentions the formality of its production to him in the saloon of the Princess, who had amassed an extensive collection of curiosities of various descriptions, among which this despicable chair, in a green case, was carefully preserved.

Between the rafters and tiling of this house is said to have been found the spiritual will of John Shakespeare, certainly of very “questionable shape;” and which Malone did not believe to have been written by any of our poet’s family.

To these historical memoranda there is little to be added. During Garrick’s Jubilee in September, 1769, the last public honours were bestowed upon this lowly habitation, by covering it with an emblematical transparency, depicting the sun struggling through clouds to enlighten the world ; underneath which was this motto—

Thus dying clouds contend with glowing light,
a figurative representation of the fate and fortunes of our
much admired bard.





NOTE.

T appears from a document relating to a suit contested in the year 1638, that about the year 1598, John Shakespeare sold to his next neighbour on the east side, who was desirous of amalgamating two small tenements into one, "and wantinge roome for that purpose," a small piece of ground on that side of the Birth-place, measuring "aboute seaventeene foote square, as hee taketh it." It is, therefore, evident that John Shakespeare made at least two small alienations from the original property late in the sixteenth century. The evidence of the last is contained in an answer sworn in the Court of Requests, October the 9th, 1638, in a suit of Wastell against Willis, in which the defendant avers "that Edward Willis of Kingsnorton was in his life-tyme lawfully seised in his demeasne as of fee of and in twoe small burgages or tenementes, with thappurtenances, in Stratford upon Avon, and beinge desirous to make the same one tenement dwelling, and wantinge roome for that purpose, thereupon the said Edward Willis did about fortie yeares since purchase to him and his heires of and from one Shakespeare one parcell of land conteyninge aboute seaventeene foote square, as hee taketh it, next adjoyninge to one of the said burgages or tenementes, and which parcell of ground and backside this defendant conceiveth to be the parcell of ground or backside intended by the said bill; and the said Edward Willis about fortie yeares since did make and erect one intire tenement upon a greate parte of the same; and havinge soe made, erected, and converted the same into one tenement, thereupon and after the same was soe made into one tenement, and had bene soe enjoyed for diverse yeares, hee the said Edward Willis by deed indented bearing date the twentieth daye of July, 7 James I., geve, grante, &c., to Thomas Osborne and Bartholomewe Austeyne, and their heires, all the said twoe burgages or tenementes and parcell of ground and backside, &c., all that messuage or tenement and burgage, with thappurtenances, called the Bell, otherwise the signe of the Bell, heretofore used or occupied in twoe tenementes, scituare in a streets

commonly called Henley Streete, and nowe or late in the tenure or occupacion of Robert Brookes, or of his assignes or undertenantes, betweene the tenement of Thomas Horneby on the east parte, and the tenement late of William Shakespeare on the west parte, and the streete aforesaid on the south parte, and the Kinges highe way called Gilpittes on the north parte." This curious piece of evidence was discovered by Mr. Collier, long after Mr. Wheler's tract was published, and reveals a fact which could not otherwise have been suspected. It is to be feared that the exact boundary of the Shakespearian property on the eastern side can now never be accurately ascertained.



THE SHAKESPEARE MUSEUM.



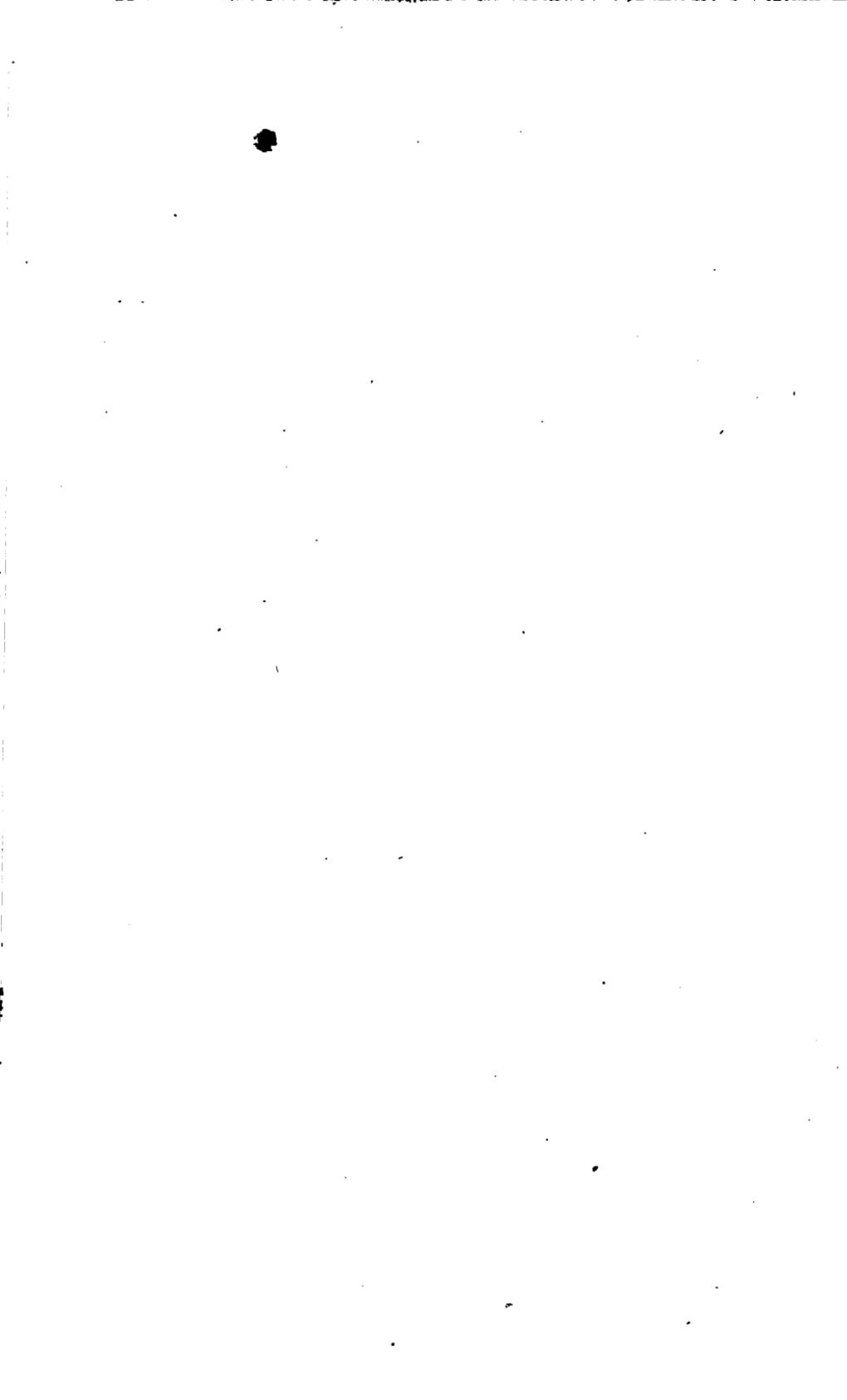
MUSEUM to contain books, manuscripts, relics, &c. illustrative of the Life and Writings of Shakespeare, or of the history and antiquities of Stratford-on-Avon, is in the course of formation in that portion of the Birth-place which was heretofore used as the Swan and Maidenhead.

It is to be hoped that those who possess old books or papers, especially volumes of old plays, will search carefully for any of Shakespearian interest. Presents of course will be thankfully received for the Museum, but owners of any such relics wishing to dispose of them will also much oblige by communicating with J. O. HALLIWELL, ESQ., No. 6, St. Mary's Place, West Brompton, near London.

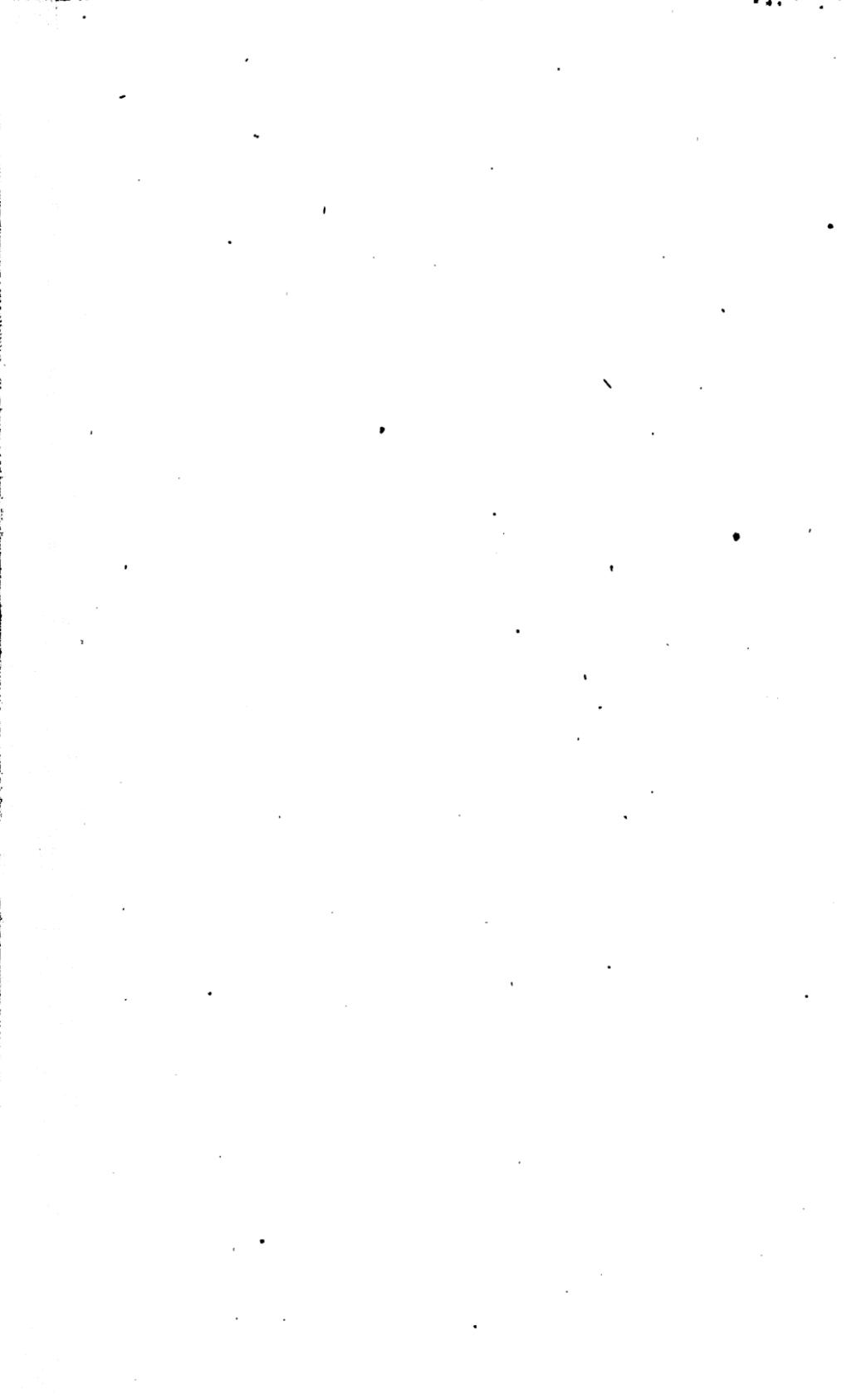
SHAKESPEARE FACSIMILES.



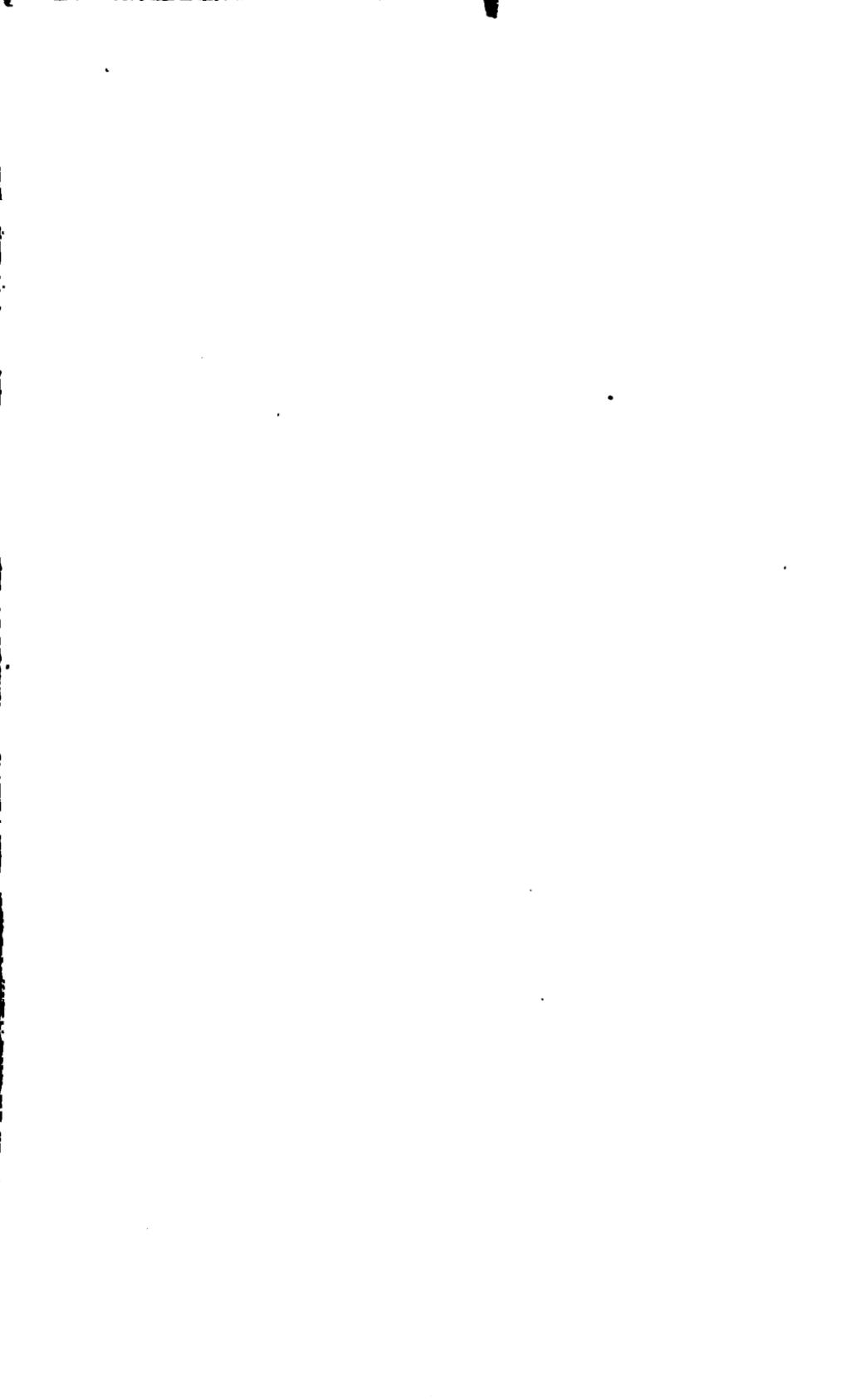
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